

BELMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

March 5, 2002

Members Present: M. Flamang, K. Baskin, M. King, M. Weil, J. Curro, L. Allen.
Associate Members Present: J. Smith, N. Davis, M. Velie

Additional Attendees: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Office of Community Development), Bruce Westgate and Geno Volpe (Belmont Victory Gardens), Richard Westcott (Westcott Site Services), Stephen Kidder and Michele L. Gougeon (McLean Hospital), Lucille Dressler (Shade Tree) and George Edmonds (30 Shady Brook Lane).

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

The minutes of January 8, 2002 were approved, with the following changes: the attendees will be listed and M. King will be added to the list of members of the Rock Meadow Management Plan subcommittee.

Annual Report of Belmont Victory Gardens

Bruce Westgate and Geno Volpe appeared on behalf of the Belmont Victory Gardens. They reported that the current practice of mowing half the meadow each year has been effective, except that plants and brush are invading the meadow at its edges. The meadow shrinks a little each year. This affects the bluebird population and the gardens themselves.

The popularity of the gardens seems to be waning. There are 125-130 plots and 115 were used last year. They took in \$1100 at \$13 per lot last year and have used a portion of the fees to put in water lines.

Dogs have been running free up there. On Saturday mornings, there are usually 15 or 20 dogs. Mr. Volpe suggested that the dog officer should enforce the leash law there. G. Clancy asked how they would react to a plan to let dogs run off the leash there. Volpe thinks allowing it in the meadow would reduce the wildlife population, even if it was only permitted in the area near the transfer station.

The Belmont Victory Gardens requests that some of the brush at the edges of the meadow be cut down to restore the meadow to its original size.

Public Hearing - Notice of Intent - Water Main Installation, McLean Hospital Property

Mr. Westcott appeared on behalf of McLean Hospital. He pointed out that the water main installation will affect the same wetland which the Northland notice of intent dealt with. The water main will follow the existing pathway; which is a more winding route, but it is the path already disrupting the wetland, and it will enable them to find the water main more easily if it needs to be dug up for repair. One end is also under the parking lot and road, although within the buffer zone. Restoration will occur immediately after installation.

Mr. Kidder pointed out that the restoration is under the jurisdiction of, and subject to overview by, the McLean Land Management Committee, as directed by the Planning Board. Upon specific questioning by the Commission members, Mr. Westcott stated that the installation involved no gas mains or other utilities, the pipe used would be a 12" pipe, and the main will be owned by the Belmont Water

Department (constructed by the Hospital to the specifications of the Water Department). Additionally, the wetlands will be protected by clay impervious dams (anti-seep collars) installed above and below the wetlands. This will prevent inadvertent draining of water away from the wetlands and vernal pool. Upon further discussion, the Commission agreed that additional anti-seep collars would be desirable at 6 plus 50 and 10 plus 50.

The Commission approved the requested Order of Conditions, on the condition that the erosion and sediment control plan set forth in the Notice of Intent be incorporated, and that a requirement for additional anti-seep collars at 6 plus 50 and 10 plus 50 be included.

Public Hearing - Request for Determination of Applicability - Proposed Tree Removal - 30 Shady Brook Lane

Mr. Edmonds, owner, stated that a group of ash trees on his property are dead. An arborist (Sinclair Weeks) has marked the dead trees and Mr. Edmonds wants to remove them. He would like to replace them with native trees. The Commission discussed whether they have jurisdiction and can require a notice of intent.

Upon questioning by Commission members, Mr. Edmonds stated that he wants to remove the trees because of the fire hazard and the danger of trees falling. He would leave the stumps, chip as much as they can and haul out the rest. Removal would necessarily be by hand because a machine can't be taken in.

The Commission agreed upon a negative determination, with the following conditions: a replanting plan will be submitted to the Commission for approval, enumerating the number of trees removed and the number and species of planned replacement trees, the dead trees will be removed from the site, and no machinery will be used for such removal.

McLean Open Space

M. Flamang volunteered to serve as the Commission's representative on the McLean Land Management Committee beginning in the fall.

G. Clancy noted that the McLean Land Management Committee is expecting comments from the Commission on four issues. First, should mountain bikes be permitted? The Committee would like to leave the question open, to be decided at a later date. The New England Mountain Bike Association would like bikes to be permitted, and would like to set up a kiosk with information, maps of paths, etc. Presumably this would result in more bikers, but they could help enforce compliance with the rules. Biking is permitted or tolerated there now. Discussion centers on the issue of possibility of collision among bikers or between bikers and pedestrians on the existing paths (they are winding, narrow and unpaved) The Commission discussed the possibility of restricting bikes to a wide paved path or to a perimeter path (neither of which exists now).

The Commission reached a consensus that it is not opposed to bike use if the following conditions are imposed: use should be restricted to existing paved roads and fire lanes, and perimeter roads if there are any; and use should be prohibited in any area which could be subject to erosion as a result.

The Commission was also asked for comments on the planned communication tower on the McLean property. It will carry all communications for the Town, including emergency communications. Should it be camouflaged? Should it be rented out to private commercial companies? G. Clancy thinks up to three additional companies could use the tower. The Commission agreed that commercial use should be

permitted, particularly if the revenue is applied toward the maintenance of the open space, and that camouflage is not needed, particularly if the Town has to pay for it.

The Commission was also asked for comments on utilities on the open space. The Commission agreed that neither installation of new utilities, nor maintenance work on any existing utilities, should be allowed without the approval of the Land Management Committee.

The McLean Land Management Committee would like to provide for some future flexibility in the Conservation Restriction to deal with future changes in the utilities. The Commission agreed that they would allow for limited changes in the future, but would specify a threshold for those changes.

L. Allen will send a letter to the Land Management Committee confirming the Commission's position regarding acting as holder of the Conservation Restriction, as stated at the Land Management Committee meeting of February 5, 2002.

Rock Meadow Management Plan

M. Flamang stated that he may have assistance from a high school student on the Management Plan. This student will help him determine how much space is generally needed for some of the proposed uses. He also noted that we will need additional money to do some of the things the Commission would like to do (for example, reclaiming the meadow by clearing the brush at the edges). Therefore, we should have a budget. K. Baskin suggested that we may be able to get a grant from one of several sources.

A site visit was proposed. M. Flamang volunteered to lead one on March 16, 2002. Commission members (and others) who are interested should meet at the parking lot by the Victory Gardens at 10:00 AM that day, and let M. Flamang know if they cannot attend.

New Business

A letter was received from Ellen Mass of the Friends of Alewife Reservation requesting that the Commission do something about rubble and debris behind the Hill Estates on Blanchard Road. G. Clancy stated that he has viewed the area and believes it is almost entirely located on the Cambridge area of the property. The Commission agreed that a letter will be sent to the owners of the property, with a copy to the Cambridge Conservation Commission, informing the owners that it has received a complaint and requesting that the debris be removed.

L. Allen will write a letter to the McLean Land Management Committee stating that the Commission will fill its seat on the Committee on an ad hoc basis until September, at which time M. Flamang will serve as the Commission's representative.

The Commission also discussed whether water conservation measures should be suggested to the public in light of the current dry conditions. M. Flamang pointed out that the MWRA has not notified the Commission of a problem. Also, the Commission agreed that the Belmont Water Department should be consulted before any measures are taken. G. Clancy will consult with them. K. Baskin suggested a press release reminding the public of conservation measures they can take.

The Commission discussed the proposed amendments to the DEP's Wetlands Protection Regulations regarding the determination of whether streams are intermittent or perennial. K. Baskin reviewed the manner in which the size of a watershed is determined.

The meeting was then adjourned. The next meeting will be held at the Faculty Dining Room at Chenery Middle School on Tuesday, April 2, 2002.